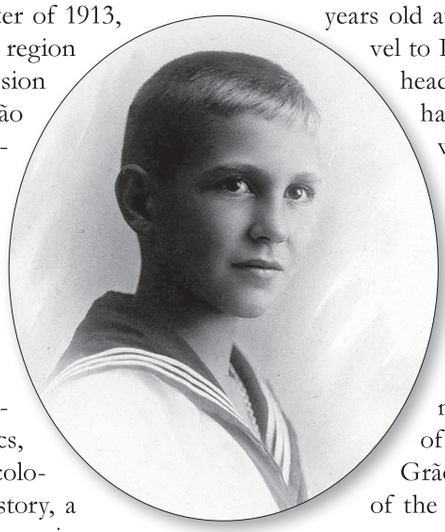
The centenary of Prince Citizen

D. Pedro Gastão de Orleans e Bragança was born a hundred years ago

by Victor Villon

On this 19th of February, 2013, Brazilian Prince Dom Pedro Gastão, Head of the Imperial House of Brazil, would have celebrated his 100th birthday. The date is an opportunity to remember the life of one who, I believe, was the last representative of an era. I would like to make a few remarks about this prince's life, remarks that are not restricted to the succession of dates, but are also combined with a personal interpretation of Dom Pedro Gastão.

According to tradition in the House of Bragança, the child who was born in the winter of 1913, at the Château d'Eu, in the French region of Normandy, received a long succession of names: Pedro de Alcântara Gastão Maria João Filipe Lourenço Humberto Miguel Gabriel Rafael Gonzaga. And in order to understand the factors that led to a Brazilian prince being born in Normandy, one must go back a little over a hundred years before his birth.



With the invasion of Portugal by Napoleonic troops in 1807, the Portuguese court took refuge in the tropics, more precisely, in the largest of its colonies, Brazil. For the first time in history, a colony was turned into a metropolis, seeing as the royal power would no longer emanate from Lisbon, but from Rio de Janeiro. Prince Dom João had already assumed the regency in 1792, because his mother, Queen Maria I,was affected by severe psychiatric problems and could no longer take care of government affairs. And it was this Prince Regent,Dom João, who was obliged to make the difficult decision to cross the Atlantic to safeguard the Portuguese monarchy. With the death of Queen Maria I, which took place in Brazil in 1816, Dom João became Dom João VI.

The royal family's stay changed the features of the former colony forever. During the years in Brazil, the kingdom of Portugal was devoid of the sovereign's presence, and the dissatisfaction with the unusual reversal of roles, between metropolis and colony, triggered the Constitutional Revolution in Porto in 1820. The Courts convened in Lisbon demanded the monarch's return, which would happen in 1821.

However, in Brazil, Dom João VI left his son and heir, Dom Pedro, who later became Dom Pedro I of Brazil and IV of Portugal. In Portugal, the Courts had proclaimed a constitution and imposed limits to the absolute power of the king. But if the Courts yearned to install a modern monarchy in Portugal, in the spirit of new ideas, its relationship with Brazil was still rooted in old assumptions: the elevation of Brazil's status to kingdom was unacceptable and they wanted the return of the colonial pact.

In 1822, Dom Pedro proclaimed the independence of the Empire of Brazil, thus becoming the first sovereign of the newborn nation. Indeed, independence was, above all, a partition between the European Portuguese and the American Portuguese. Years later, in 1836, a crisis would force the first emperor of Brazil to renounce the crown of the tropics to his son, despite the boy being only six years old at the time. Dom Pedro I would travel to Portugal to fight the absolutist forces headed by his brother Dom Miguel, who had proclaimed himself king. The child who had remained in Brazil would become Dom Pedro II and would personally rule Brazil for nearly five decades. In his reign, the bases of national unity would be formed and slavery would be abolished.

On the 15th of November 1889 a coup triggered the end of the monarchy. In Petrópolis, resort town of the imperial family, the Prince of Grão-Pará, a boy of fourteen, grandson of the emperor, was horse-riding when he was summoned and informed that a Republic had been proclaimed. He had to leave immediately; there wasn't even enough time to say goodbye to old and faithful employees. This is the story Dom Pedro Gastão told, describing the unusual way in which the end of the monarchy had been announced to his father, the Prince of Grão-Pará. At dawn on the 17th of November, the imperial family fled for exile, and it was in that same exile that Dom Pedro Gastão would be born. Monarchy had ended once and for all in Brazil.

Dom Pedro Gastão's father was meant to undergo military training, following the traditions of the ancient nobility, but the French Republic banned descendants of the former rulers of France from joining the armed forces. Therefore, Dom Pedro de Alcântara attended the Wiener Neustadt academy, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this aristocratic environment, the Brazilian Prince became acquainted with the Dobrzensky brothers, who belonged to the ancient nobility of Bohemia. During military leaves, as France was just too far to return to, Dom Pedro de Alcântara accompanied the brothers to the Dobrzensky von Dobrzenicz family property, the Chotebor Castle. In Chotebor, Dom Pedro de Alcântara fell in love with his friends' sister, Elisabeth. However, Princess Isabel, then the Head of the Imperial House of Brazil, and Gaston d'Orléans Count d'Eu, her

husband, did not accept that their son, the heir presumptive to the crown, would marry someone who was not of royal descent. For this reason, the engagement lasted for many years and the situation was only resolved when Dom Luiz, Count d'Eu's second son, became engaged to a princess of the Royal House of the Two Sicilies. Pressured by his parents, Dom Pedro de Alcântara eventually signed a letter, waiving the rights granted to him by the Brazilian Constitution of 1824. However this letter was not valid for several reasons, among them the fact that the document was never ratified by an official body[1]. The wedding took place at Versailles on the 14th of November, 1908.

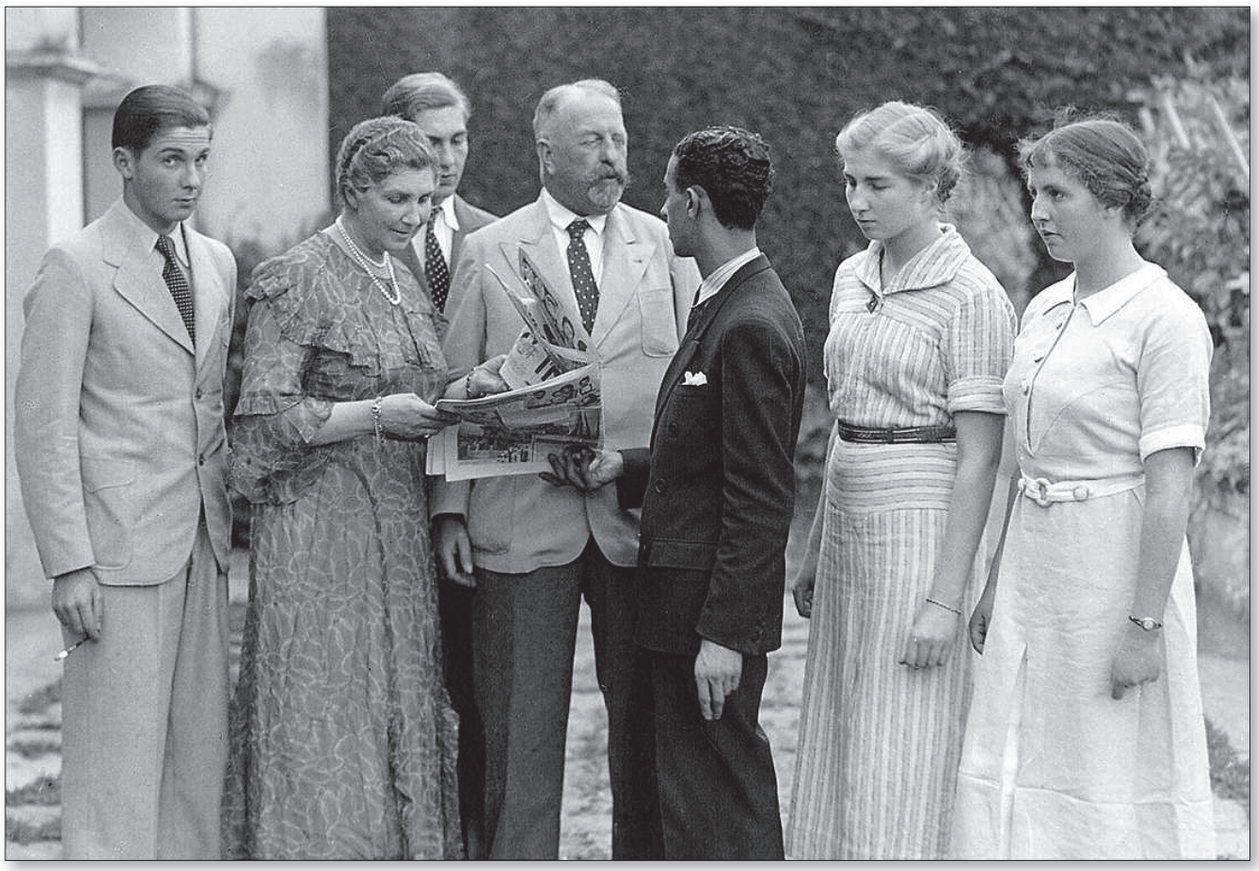
From this union between Prince Dom Pedro de Alcântara and Dona Elisabeth, would be born: Dona Isabel (1911-2003), later Countess of Paris, who would marry Henri d'Orléans, heir presumptive to the throne of France; Dom Pedro Gastão (1912-2007); Dona Francisca, later Duchess of Bragança (1914-1968), who would marry the heir presumptive to the throne of Portugal, Dom Duarte Nuno; Dom João (1916-2005) and Dona Teresa (1919-2011) who would marry the Portuguese industrialist Ernesto Martorell y Calderó.

Dom Pedro Gastão spent the first years of his life surrounded by nostalgia for his Brazilian home, between the Château d'Eu and a residence at Boulogne-sur-Seine, just outside Paris, both properties of his paternal grandparents, the Counts d'Eu. The family expressed their longing for their lost land in a constant celebration of the lush and fruitful Brazilian landscape. The prince remembered constant reminders at home that there were neither fruit nor birds like those of Brazil... He remembered that, on one occasion, his grandmother Princess Isabel's birthday, he and his sister, Dona Isabel (the future Countess of Paris), recited the Canção do Exílio (Song of Exile), written by Brazilian poet of the Romantic period, Gonçalves Dias. While listening to her grandchildren recite the poem in Portuguese, with the lines, "My land has palm trees / Where the Sabiá sings; / The birds that sing here, / Do not sing as they do there," the elderly princess could not hold back her tears.

On the 3rd of September 1920, President Epitácio Pessoa authorized the repatriation of the mortal remains of Emperor Dom Pedro II and Empress Dona Thereza Christina to Brazil. He also revoked the decree of the 21st of December 1889, that prohibited the imperial family from setting foot on Brazilian territory. The law, which became known as the Banishment Law, and had remained in force for three decades, was repealed. At last Dom Pedro Gastão could get to know his homeland, the mythical land of Brazil.

In the year of 1922, aboard the Curvelo ship, D. Pedro d'Alcantara, D. Elisabeth, D. Isabel (the future Countess of Paris) and D. Pedro Gastão proceeded to the celebrations of the Centenary of Brazilian Independence.

The family returned to Brazil in 1925. Through 1925 and 1926, Dom Pedro de Alcântara made several tours



of Brazil and, in a pioneering gesture, filmed its most remote corners, which at that time were virtually unexplored. Dom Pedro Gastão accompanied his father on several of these journeys, traversing long distances and reaching places that were difficult to access. In 1928, Dom Pedro Gastão returned to Europe, but from 1935 onwards the family would fix its residence in the Palace of the Grão-Pará, in Petrópolis.

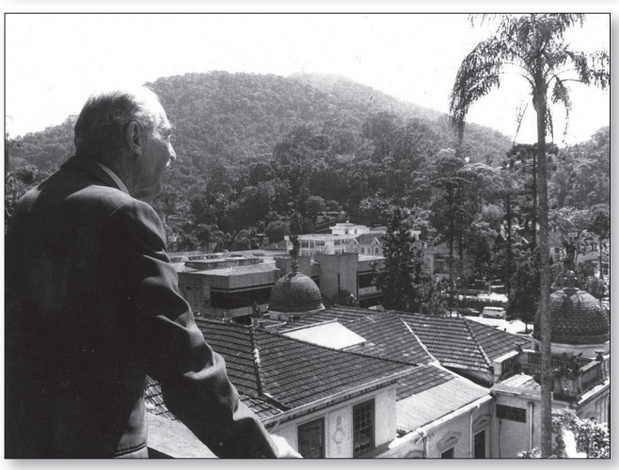
After the death of his father in 1940, Dom Pedro Gastão managed the Realty Company of Petrópolis[2]. In 1943 his cousin, Dom Pedro Henrique, eldest son of Dom Luiz, sold his part of the Company's shares to Dom Pedro Gastão. However, some time later he wanted to repossess the shares. The dispute was taken to court, which found in favour of Dom Pedro Gastão, deciding that his cousin's allegations were groundless[3]. The dispute seems to have been a manifestation of an ancient tension between the two cousins, directly related to the rights of leadership within the Imperial House of Brazil. In fact, the symbolic inheritance of the Brazilian Emperors was always bestowed upon the eldest branch, that is, the Petrópolis branch[4]. While the Empire lasted, the natural heir of Dom Pedro II and Princess Isabel had always been Dom Pedro d'Alcântara, Prince of Grão-Pará. And it was the latter's son, Dom Pedro Gastão who, beyond any doubt, embodied for decades the symbols and memory of the House of Bragança in Brazil.

The charismatic personality of Dom Pedro Gastão, as well as his democratic and conciliatory stance, stood in strong contrast to the uncompromising personality of his cousin Dom Pedro Henrique, who was deeply rooted in ultraconservative convictions, which made him as active supporter of the TFP[5] movement, one of the bastions of the military and dictatorial regime that prevailed in Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

On the 18th of December 1944, Dom Pedro Gastão married Dona Esperanza of Bourbon in the Cathedral of Seville. Dona Esperanza was the daughter of the second marriage of Dom Carlos of Bourbon-Siciles, Infant of Spain, and Louise d'Orléans, daughter of Philippe d'Orléans Count of Paris, heir presumptive to the throne of France and sister of Dona Amelia, Queen of Portugal. From the union of Dom Pedro Gastão and Dona Esperanza six children were born, and the eldest son, Dom Pedro Carlos, was the first member of the imperial family to be born in Brazil since the 1889 exile. He was followed by Dona Maria da Glória, Dom Afonso, Dom Manuel, Dona Christina and Dom Francisco.

After Louise d'Orléans' death in 1958, the former Villamanrique de la Condesa property, was inherited by Dona Esperanza. Since then, the couple alternated their residence between the Palace of Grão-Pará in Petrópolis, Brazil, and the Palace of Villamanrique, in Andalusia, Spain.

Dom Pedro Gastão was extremely captivating. The halls of the Grão-Pará palace were always open to all comers. There, he received eminent figures like the King and Queen of Sweden, journalists and even school stu-



dents. He answered the phone in person, and all the letters that were sent to him. He had a very distinctive manner, which is increasingly rare in our time, combining perfectly and without contradiction an elegance of dress, and regal bearing worthy of his origins, with kindness and simplicity.

An expert horseman, the figure of Dom Pedro Gastão riding through the streets of Petrópolis came to be a real symbol of the Imperial City. But also, his unmistakable French accent when speaking Portuguese and Portuguese accent when speaking Spanish; his knowledge of flora and fauna; and his lively conversation, elegant in mood and with a refined irony, were unforgettable.

The renowned expert in dynastic history, Juan Balansó, commenting on the cousins of King Juan Carlos of Spain in his book La Familia Real y la familia irreal, paints an interesting portrait of Dom Pedro Gastão:

"The last of the king's cousins by blood are true imperial princes, the Orleans e Bragança, as, it will be remembered that Dona Esperanza of Bourbon married the pretender to the Brazilian throne, Dom Pedro, always a pleasant man on all occasions, a great man, 'a hundred percent Brazilian' his countrymen say. . . . .the family lives in Petrópolis, majestically residing in an annex of the former Brazilian imperial palace, and in Seville, where Dona Esperanza manages a large agricultural family property in Vilamanrinque de la Condesa. I had the honour to be received in both places, and certify that the Brazilians and Sevillians dispute over them. It seems unlikely that monarchy will be restored in Brazil after the referendum that will be held in September of 1993 (as the republic was established by a military coup a hundred years ago with the promise of a referendum to legalize it, which took a century to be carried out). The Republican government will not be so lax as to allow its power to be taken, relinquishing its powerful state methods of propaganda. However, I am convinced that Dom Pedro could be a great constitutional emperor, like Pedro I and Pedro II before him . . . ."[6]

In the late 1990s, Dom Pedro Gastão stumbled and fell in the Palace of Grão-Pará, and the consequences of what seemed like a simple incident gradually undermined his health. On the dawn of the 27th of December 2007, at the Villamanrique Palace, the man that could have been Dom Pedro IV, Emperor of Brazil, passed away. The coffin, covered with a flag of the Empire of Brazil, was accompanied by several family members, belonging to the great royal houses of Europe; first the king of Spain, as well as various other authorities of the region of Andalusia. Dom Pedro Gastão was buried in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, a few meters from his Andalusian palace, where since 2005 Dona Esperanza already rested in peace. In Villamanrique, as on the far side of the ocean, in Petrópolis, official mourning was decreed. In several countries, the newspapers repor-

ted the death of Dom Pedro Gastão. And the French magazine Point de Vue, devoted a story to him entitled Dom Pedro l'Empereur est Mort (Dom Pedro the Emperor is dead)[7].

Expressions of sympathy and appreciation for Dom Pedro Gastão, throughout his long life, were abundant; I would like to quote from the one I believe to be the most significant. The celbrated British historian Roderick Barman dedicated to Dom Pedro Gastão his important work: Citizen Emperor: Pedro II and the Making of Brazil, writing: "To D. Pedro Gastão de Orleans e Bragança, great-grandson of the Citizen Emperor & great-great-grandson of the Citizen King." A suggestive dedication to one who was the Citizen Prince.

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1 The legal invalidity of the "resignation" of D. Pedro d'Alcântara was demonstrated by Brazilian jurist Paulo Napoleão Nogueira da Silva Cf: NOGUEIRA DA SILVA, Paulo Napoleão "Parecer sobre a Renúncia do Príncipe Dom Pedro d'Alcântara" in Monarquia Verdades e Mentiras. São Paulo: Edições GRD, 1994. Title freely translated to: "Opinion on the Resignation of Prince Dom Pedro d'Alcântara" in Monarchy Truths and Lies. See also: VILLON, Victor: Elisabeth Dobrzensky von Dobrzenicz "Empress of Brazil" in Royalty Digest Quarterly. Falköping. 3/2008. p.28–35.

2 The Realty Company of Petrópolis is responsible for collecting the laudemium. When D. Pedro II transformed the old farm of his property in the city of Petrópolis, it was established that 2.5% of sales made, thereafter, would go to the Imperial Family. The tribute is named laudemium (laudêmio).

3 See A Cessão de ações da Companhia Imobiliária de Petrópolis (Fazenda Imperial). Feito Cível nº 166 (apelação). Sine nomine, sine loco: 1947. Freely translated to "Assignment of Realty Company of Petrópolis shares (Imperial Treasury).

4 The Imperial Family of Brazil is divided into two branches: one known by the name of Petrópolis branch, which comprises the descendants of D. Pedro de Alcântara, and that known by Vassouras branch comprising the descendants of D. Luiz.

5 Acronym for: Tradition, Family and Property.

6 BALANSÓ, Juan: La Familia Real y la família irreal. Barcelona, Editorial Planeta, 1992. (3º edição) p. 192 Book title freely translated to "The royal and unroyal family"

7 Hommage: Dom Pedro l'empereur est mort in Point de Vue n° 3102, semaine du 2 au 9 janvier 2008.